Life is a *Fitnah*!
(as Understood From *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot*)
Shaykh Saalih ibn 'Abdil-'Azeez Aalish-Shaykh
From a recorded lecture [1] **translated exclusively for bakkah.net**

[In the Name of Allaah, the All-Merciful, may His *Salaah* and *Salaam* be upon His final Messenger to all mankind, and upon his companions and family members, and all those who follow his path until the Day of Judgement, to proceed:]

The central theme of *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot*, as some of the scholars have mentioned, is *fitnah* (trials and tribulations). *Fitnah* is mentioned right from the very beginning of the *soorah* where Allaah says [2]:

(*Alif - Laam - Meem*. Do people then think they will be left alone upon saying, *"We believe in Allaah,"* and they will not be faced with *fitnah*? And verily we put those who came before them to trials, so that Allaah would make known those who have been truthful, and so that Allaah would make known the liars.)

So *fitnah* is mentioned specifically in the beginning of the *soorah*.

So what kind of *fitnah* are people tried with? A man may be put to trial due to his intellect, or by the *dunyaa*. He may be tried by his parents or by his family. He may be put to *fitnah* by way of a long lifespan. His *fitnah* may be that he faces no hardships at all in life! So the reality is that a man may be tested by a variety of trials, all of them are mentioned here in this *soorah*.

So in this *soorah*, *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot*, Allaah mentions the varieties of trials and the foundations that they are built upon. He also mentions how a man may be saved from these kinds of trials.

That is because this worldly life, in reality, is merely a test and a trial. The Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alayhe wa sallam*) said, as 'Iyyaadh ibn Himaar narrated, and it has been collected by Imaam Muslim in his *Saheeh*:

"Allaah, Most High, has said, *'Yaa Muhammad! Verily I have only sent you to put you to trials and to put others to trial by way of you.'*" [3]

So life, in reality, is just a *fitnah*. And this *fitnah* - is it by way of evil things or good things? It is by way of evil and good things alike! (Allaah says) [4]:

(And We shall test you with trials of evil and good, and to Us you will return)

Look to what Allaah mentions in the beginning of this *soorah*:

(Do people then think…)

Who is included in the word **(people)**? It includes both the believer and the disbeliever. It includes both the old and young. It includes all categories of people as they interact with all other categories.

(Do people then think they will be left alone upon saying, *"We believe in Allaah,"* and they will not be faced with *fitnah*?)

You say you are a believer, so when can your faith be considered true *eemaan*? That is when trials have been placed in front of you, and you have passed them successfully upon Allaah's Order.

You might even be tried by your own self! There are people who are put to *fitnah* because of their beauty and good qualities. A woman may be tested by her own possessions, and a man may also be tested by his own wealth. One may be tested by his parents as well. So you will find in this *soorah* mention of all these kinds of *fitnah*, their origins, and solutions to them.

The *Fitnah* of Disbelieving Parents

Take this example: In the first part of the *soorah*, Allaah says [5]:

(And we have commanded the people to be good to their parents. But if they strive to make you join partners with Me, those that you have no knowledge of, then do not obey them! To Me is your return.)

Note here that some parents cause *fitnah* and strive to make a servant commit *shirk*. Isn't this a *fitnah*? Indeed it is a tremendous *fitnah*!

The scholars of *Tafseer* have mentioned that this verse was revealed about the events involving Sa'd ibn Abee Waqqaas, when his mother tried to turn him back to disbelief. Even with this kind of situation, Allaah ordered him to bear the company of his parents with kindness, but no to obey them. He said [5]:

(But if they strive to make you join partners with Me, those that you have no knowledge of, then do not obey them! To Me is your return and I will inform you of what you used to do.)

And He said in the beginning of the verse:

(And we have commanded the people to be good to their parents)

This is a tremendous *fitnah*! So then what is the way out of it? The answer is, with the proper understanding of Allaah's Legislation, that you do not obey them when they command you with *kufr*, *shirk*, or disobedience to Allaah, however you still bear their company with kindness.

There are some people who are tried by this *fitnah*, and they accompany their parents, not in kindness, but with harshness, and have thus fallen into the prohibition to some degree. The one who can be patient with such a difficult affair, bearing their companionship with kindness and not obeying them (when they order him with disobedience to Allaah), is the one who is successful in dealing with *fitnah* in such a case.

The *Fitnah* of Being in the Minority

Another kind of *fitnah* is when a person sees a great number of people disbelieving in Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic. They do not believe, and so along comes a man and feels that he and the people of faith are very few, and that the disbelievers, the hypocrites, criminals, or disobedient ones are the majority. How can he keep straight himself, how? This is a kind of *fitnah* that attacks the heart.

Very few of the people in this kind of situation stay firm. Most of them look to the people - the majority are into evil, so they fall into it. In this *soorah*, there is mention of this issue, along with the solution! So read the *soorah* and contemplate over that. [6]

The *Fitnah* of Seeing the Enjoyment of the Disbelievers

Another kind of *fitnah* that is mentioned in this *soorah* is that a man sees the enemies of Allaah and His Messenger (*sallallaahu 'alayhe wa sallam*) living long, secure lives. He sees that they live long lives on earth, enjoying their strength and oppressing others, and they are the enemies of Allaah, polytheists!

This may lead him to start following the pleasures of the *dunyaa*, and join them in preventing others from the path of Allaah. (Allaah says) [7]:

(The life of this *dunyaa* is made beautiful to those who have disbelieved. They have mocked the people who believed, but the people who have *taqwaa* will be above them on the Day of Judgement)

That was from *Soorah Al-Baqarah*. In this *soorah*, *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot*, Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic mentions the story of Nooh (*'alayhis-salaam*) in only two verses. What is the relationship of this story to the them of the *soorah*, which is *fitnah*?

Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic, says [8]:

(And verily we sent Nooh to his people, and stayed amongst them (calling them to Allaah) **for all of 1000 years, save 50. Then the great flood**

overtook them while they were oppressive. So we saved him and those on his boat, and we made it a sign for all the creation.)

The story of Nooh is found here in only two verses? What is the reason for that? This entire time, 950 years, he was inviting them, while the believers were very few, as is understood from another *soorah* [9]:

(And no one believed along with him, except very few)

Some of the scholars explained that the number of believers had only reached 13 individuals. Others said that seventy-some men and women had believed.

He stayed amongst them a thousand years while *shirk* was the predominant practice, the worshipping of idols: Wadd, Suwaa', Yaghooth, Ya'ooq, and Nasr. [10] And he was advising them and inviting them day and night, secretly and openly, and no one responded except this small number. Wouldn't the hearts be facing a *fitnah*?

Indeed this was a *fitnah*. It was not just 10, 20, or 50 years, or even 100 years. 200 years went by, 300, 400, 500, to a complete 1000 years, save 50. Then finally came the way out from Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic.

Therefore, a man may be put to trial by seeing the long lives of the enemies. So this *soorah* causes the true believer to take heed and realize that this is for a reason. (Allaah says) [11]:

(So that Allaah would make known those who have been truthful, and so that Allaah would make known the liars.)

When will this be made known? When the *fitnah* is encountered, and it is dealt with successfully. So the theme of the *soorah*, as we are noting, is *fitnah*, even with the story of the Prophet (Nooh). The lesson here is *fitnah*, and what will save you from the *fitnah* that lasts for a long time.

Some people mistakenly think that Allaah's affair will reach him however they want. No, rather the wisdom of Allaah is all-encompassing. He will test people, as He tested Nooh (*'alayhis-salaam*) and his people, as they lived amongst their people (calling them to Allaah) for 950 years, and after that only a small group of people responded.

So one way to succeed in the face of trials is mentioned here in the *soorah*, and that is by way of patience. (Allaah says) [12]:

(So we saved him and those on his boat, and we made it a sign for all the creation)

The Fitnah of Argumentation

Then we see in the story of Ibraaheem another kind of *fitnah* - opponents who argue and fight against the invitation, they do not submit, rather they only plot and plan. Certain things from the *dunyaa* that they love are made very dear to them, as Allaah says [13]:

(And he (Ibraaheem) **said, *"You have taken idols as objects of worship instead of Allaah, loving them. But this love is only for the dunyaa, as on the Day of Judgement you shall disown each other…"*)**

So in argumentation there is a kind of *fitnah*. Few people have patience upon the Truth, remaining upon it, without becoming affected by this kind of *fitnah*, the doubts that the polytheists and disbelievers may instill in one's mind. These doubtful thoughts become renewed with the passing of time.

The *Fitnah* of Passions and Desires

After this, Allaah mentions the story of Loot (*'alayhis-salaam*). In it is mention of the *fitnah* of the desires of men that go against man's very nature. This, along with a number of other passions and their outward promotion of them, they claimed that there was no harm in them. They would refute anyone who prohibited them from their actions.

He (Loot) prohibited them, and said, *"You are practicing all kinds of evil in your gatherings!"* But all they said to him was, *"Bring us Allaah's Punishment if you are indeed truthful!"* [14]

It was great *fitnah* for Loot that his wife from his own house had given into their evil and became like them, encouraging the men to have intercourse with the men who came to their land, and the likes. (Allaah says) [15]:

(So we saved him and his family, except his wife, as she was from those who stayed behind)

So then the desires are a form of *fitnah*. How can one escape his desires and passions? He escapes them by recognizing that they are a source of *fitnah*.

Allaah intended for the passions in the flesh of mankind to be something that leads him to preserve his lineage (by having children), and to test the servant as well. Does he have perseverance or not? Does he push forward, firm upon what Allaah wants from him, or does he turn to his desires and lose hold of his grasp over them, going after anything he wants?

So in this story, the *fitnah* was something that led to the release of Allaah's Punishment upon those who did not cease doing things He, the Mighty and Majestic, had forbidden.

The *Fitnah* of Disobedience Upon Knowledge

Another kind of *fitnah* is when the people have knowledge, the society knows what is correct, but they do not act according to the knowledge. An ignorant man can be taught, but when knowledge has spread throughout a society and the people know the boundaries and they have some insight, but they contradict what they know, isn't that a *fitnah*?!

Knowledge has not been a blessing for them, rather it has only been a *fitnah*. Allaah, the Mighty and Exalted, mentions that the tribes of 'Aad and Thamood were people of knowledge. They knew and had insight, but with that they rebelled and disobeyed. Allaah, may He be glorified, said [16]:

(And (remember the destruction of) **'Aad and Thamood! Verily their** (destroyed) **places of residence have made clear to you** (how they were destroyed)**. The Shaytaan beautified their actions for them and kept them away from the Path, while they were people of insight.)**

The Shaytaan beautified their actions for them, and then kept them away from the Path, while they were people of insight! Were they ignorant? No. Were they deficient in some of their knowledge? No. They had knowledge, but the Shaytaan had beautified their actions for them, and thus kept them away from the Path! All of this while they had good insight and clear vision.

This is a tremendous *fitnah*, that a man has knowledge but he obeys the Shaytaan, leaving behind the knowledge that he has received from his Lord, the Mighty and Majestic, and from His Messenger (*sallallaahu 'alayhe wa sallam*).

The Fitnah of Argumentation

Strength can also be a *fitnah*, just as dialogues and debates are *fitnah* in many situations. Today dialogues are commonly being propagated: debating with Christians, debating between people, debating between the religions, between *math-habs*, between sects, etc. This debating is a kind of *fitnah*!

Programs about this idea are currently being broadcast on television, since they have an effect on those with weak hearts. You see the different religions and sects - this one is worshipping something, and that one is worshipping something else. A person could become doubtful and be tried due to this. But the true believer knows that this variety and assortment is only a further proof that the Truth is only one way, and that those other people are as Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic, says [17]:

(Laboring hard and weary, they will be put into a blazing hot Fire)

They wanted to follow the path to Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic, but they were mistaken. But as for the subject of debating - does a man debate or not? Does he argue or not? This is indeed a *fitnah*.

But who is the one who should debate them? The one who has knowledge, not just anyone! So it should be mentioned here that, as some of you know, some people that enter into debates with either the corrupt Muslims, the Christians, the Jews, or some other religion or stray ideology, they are occasionally defeated, or the opponent is stronger. So then the people are tried by this.

Allaah, the Mighty and Exalted, has clarified in this *soorah* that *fitnah* will spread if the dialogue is not done by the scholar arguing in a way that is better.

Allaah, the Mighty and Exalted, says [18]:

(And do not debate the People of the Book (the Jews and the Christians) **except in a way that is better, except the oppressors from them. And say: *"I believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you, and our God and your God is one, and we are submitting to Him."* And thus we revealed the Book to you...)**

Until He, the Mighty and Exalted, said [19]:

(Rather they are clear proofs in the chests of those who have been given knowledge)

So Allaah prohibits us from debating the People of the Book except in a way that is better. But who is to do the debating? The one who debates is the one who knows the Qur'aan, as Allaah says [19]:

(Rather they are clear proofs in the chests of those who have been given knowledge)

So based on this, whoever does not know the Qur'aan, the proofs found in the Qur'aan, the clear examples found in the Qur'aan, the evidences in the Qur'aan, how examples of debating have been given in the Qur'aan, examples of debating the wicked sinners, the people of arrogance, those who go beyond all boundaries, and all categories of people - whoever does not know all this, then he is not fit for debating.

So it is not for every individual to enter debates with them, using his own opinions and thoughts, rather this debating is to be done by the scholars. *Hiwaar* (debating), or *mujaadalah* as it has been named in the Qur'aan, is only for the people of knowledge, those who know the limits that Allaah sent down to his Messenger (*sallallaahu 'alayhe wa sallam*).

So therefore *fitnah* could very well take place with argumentation. A man comes and says, *"Debate with me! Why won't you debate me!?"* So he begins

by looking for a subject to debate about, what issue can he argue over… This is a way that the common people are destroyed!

So a man must look to his religion in a situation like this, and uphold and display the honor of his religion. He must know that the Qur'aan is the Truth, and whoever has it in his chest is upon the Truth, since the Qur'aan is the ongoing evidence against all the people!

It could be that a man does not know some of the proofs needed, and if that is the case, then verily he must say, as Allaah, the Mighty and Exalted, has said [20]:

(And say: *"I believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you, and our God and your God is one, and we are submitting to Him."*)

This is the general manner of debating them, and the specific and complete details are known to those who know the Qur'aan, and to those who know the *Sharee'ah*.

The *Fitnah* of the *Dunyaa*

Another *fitnah* from those mentioned in this *soorah* is that Allaah makes this life beautiful, with all of its vain pleasures and playing about, and all the things that are fun to enjoy in it. A person may indulge in these things and forget about the Next Life.

Allaah, the Mighty and Exalted, says in the latter part of the *soorah* [21]:

(And this worldly life is nothing but vain pleasures and playing about)

So many of the people are put to *fitnah* because of this life, with its vain pleasures and amusement, thinking these things will last, but they do not know the reality of life! Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic says after that [21]:

(And indeed the Next Abode is the *Hayawaan*, if they only knew)

Hayawaan is an extreme expression of the word *hayaat* (life), so the verse means that the Next Abode, Paradise and the Hellfire, is the truly complete and everlasting life. So whoever wants true delight and complete enjoyment and satisfaction, then it is in Paradise in the Next Life.

Whoever wants to be free from harmful things, then all of the harmful things are in the Hellfire. So whoever wants to flee from them, then he flees from the Hellfire.

A number of scholars, including Ibn Al-Jowzee, have said, explaining this, *"Whatever Allaah mentions in the Qur'aan about the delights of the dunyaa,*

that is for you to look at the delights of this world and contemplate over the delights of the Next Life.

For every example of an enjoyable thing or something the people indulge in, it is a proof against you if you have not reflected over the delights of Paradise.

And every example of a harmful thing in the dunyaa, even if it is something that causes a slight amount of grief, or even something as light as a slight fever, verily they are examples that Allaah is using to remind you about the things in the Next Life, the punishment, torture, and deprivation (of the Hellfire)."

So whoever seeks the real, true life and happiness, then let him look for the everlasting happiness.

This worldly life, with its amusement and playing about, is only just that - vain amusement and playing about. So it is a source of *fitnah*.

Look to the people today and how they are being tried by the amusement and play of the *dunyaa*! Why have the hearts become hardened and unreceptive? Because the people have turned to amusement and play!

Why have they turned away from the Next Life? Because they have turned to amusement and play!

Why don't they have hardly anything memorized from the Qur'aan? Because they have turned to amusement and play!

The earnest, intelligent man is the one who looks into His Statement [21]:

(And indeed the Next Abode is the *Hayawaan*, if they only knew)

The Fitnah of Safety and Security

Another kind of *fitnah* mentioned here in this *soorah*, and the escape from it is also mentioned, is the *fitnah* of safety and security.

Look at the security of the *Haram* (in Makkah), the security of the places surrounding it, after years and years of security, the people begin to believe that what befalls the other people will not befall them.

Earthquakes happen in other places, as for the people who live near the *Haram*, it does not happen to them.

Atrocities, difficult living conditions, things that befall the others… the people who live in the *Haram* say: *"We are the children of Allaah and his beloved ones!"* Or they say, *"We are His favored ones,"* or they say similar things.

Allaah, the Mighty and Exalted, has said clarifying this kind of *fitnah* near the end of the *soorah* [22]:

(Have they not seen how We have made a secure *Haram*, and people are being snatched away from all around them?)

We are to look to this kind of *fitnah*, a blessing from Allaah. This blessing of Allaah should not be a source of *fitnah* for the people, it should not be that Allaah's Blessing becomes a *fitnah*, as Allaah caused the people to be safe and secure during the time of one of the previous prophets, and as much of the time after him that He willed.

Allaah says [22]:

(Have they not seen how We have made a secure Haram, and people are being snatched away from all around them?)

What is the intent here? (Allaah says) [22]:

(Will they then believe in falsehood and become ungrateful for the blessings of Allaah!?)

Are they going to believe in falsehood after Allaah has blessed them so much!? Are they going to engage in *shirk*, *kufr*, and the rejection of the message of Muhammad (*sallallaahu 'alayhe wa sallam*), pledging obedience to the devils. Or are they going to fall into things less than that, like disobedience, sinning, and transgression?

They are ungrateful for the blessings of Allaah! Who is it that gave them those blessings? Allaah, the Mighty and Exalted! (Allaah says) [23]:

(And what you have of blessings is only from Allaah! Then when some harm reaches you, to Him you cry for help.)

Then therefore, from the many varieties of *fitnah* that Allaah may allow to befall some of his servants is what has been mentioned in this *soorah*, that a servant feels that trials and tribulations are only for other people, and that he is not tried or tested with difficulties.

So the loss of wealth, as one may think, that was for So-and-So, not for him. Sickness is for So-and-So, as for him, then he does not get sick. Severe illnesses strike the people, and may Allaah give us security from them, verily they only befall the others, as for him, he feels they will not befall him.

Strokes and things like that are for the other people, he feels that he will not face them, so he does not contemplate. Allaah, the Mighty and Exalted, says, explaining this example [22]:

(Have they not seen how We have made a secure *Haram*, and people are being snatched away from all around them? Will they then believe in falsehood and become ungrateful for the blessings of Allaah!?)

Conclusion

These are examples from the many kinds of *fitnah* and trials, and things that relate to the subject of the *soorah*. So the beginning and the end of this *soorah* meet each other upon the same subject, providing proof for those of the scholars who say, *"The subject of the soorah will be found in the agreement of the beginning and the end of a soorah."*

Allaah, the Mighty and Exalted, says in the beginning of the *soorah* [2]:

(Do people then think they will be left alone upon saying, *"We believe in Allaah,"* and they will not be faced with *fitnah*? And verily we put those who came before them to trials.)

What is the way out from all of these situations? The answer is found in the end of the *soorah*, in the very last verse [24]:

(And those who strive hard in Our Way, verily We will guide them to Our Paths. And verily Allaah is with those who do good.)

I ask Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic, to bless us all in what we have heard, and that He makes us from the people of the Qur'aan, those who are His special and favored people, and that He increases us in knowledge and that He reminds us of what we forget.

I also ask that He makes us from those who make *halaal* what is *halaal* in His Book, from those that consider what has been prohibited in His Book as *haraam*, and from those who firmly believe in what is reported in His Book about the unseen affairs. Verily He, Most High, is the Bestower of Good, the Generous One.

This article was taken from BAKKAHnet (www.bakkah.net)

FOOTNOTES (Abul-'Abbaas)

[1] from the second side of cassette entitled *Maqaasid As-Suwar wa Atharu Thaalika fit-Tafseer*, translated by Abul-'Abbaas

[2] the meaning of *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot* (29):1-3

[3] from an authentic hadeeth collected by Imaam Muslim in his *Saheeh* (#7136), it begins with: **"Verily my Lord has ordered me to teach you what you did not know from what He has taught me…"**

[4] the meaning of *Soorah Al-Ambiyaa'* (21):35

[5] the meaning of *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot* (29):7

[6] A further explanation of this comes later in the article.

[7] the meaning of *Soorah Al-Baqarah* (2):212

[8] the meaning of *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot* (29):14-15

[9] the meaning of *Soorah Hood* (11):40

[10] as mentioned in *Soorah Nooh* (71):23

[11] the meaning of *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot* (29):3

[12] the meaning of *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot* (29):15

[13] the meaning of *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot* (29):25

[14] Refer to *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot* (29):29.

[15] the meaning of *Soorah Al-A'raaf* (7):83

[16] the meaning of *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot* (29):38

[17] the meaning of *Soorah Al-Ghaashiyah* (88):3-4

[18] the meaning of *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot* (29):46-47

[19] the meaning of *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot* (29):49

[20] the meaning of *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot* (29):46

[21] the meaning of *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot* (29):64

[22] the meaning of *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot* (29):67

[23] the meaning of *Soorah An-Nahl* (16):53

[24] the meaning of *Soorah Al-'Ankaboot* (29):69